

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3213
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 06941

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: HMG VIEWS OF LOYALIST
STRIKE THREAT

REF: BELFAST 142

SUMMARY - THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE (NIO) BELIEVES
THAT THE THREATENED UNIONIST ACTION COUNCIL (UAC) STRIKE
IS LARGELY MOTIVATED BY REV. PAISLEY'S DESIRE TO IMPROVE
HIS POLITICAL STANDING FOR THE MAY LOCAL ELECTIONS,
THOUGH IT ALSO REFLECTS UNIONIST DISQUIET WITH THE CUR-
RENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN NI. HMG'S CURRENT ASSESSMENT
-- WITH THE CAVEAT THAT IT IS ALWAYS HAZARDOUS TO PRE-
DICT EVENTS IN NI -- IS THAT STRIKE ACTION, IF IT
MATERIALIZES, WILL BE FAR LESS SUCCESSFUL THAN THE 1974
GENERAL STRIKE AND WILL ULTIMATELY COLLAPSE THE NLO
BELIEVES PAISLEY WILL AVOID ANY DIRECT INVOLVEMENT
IN ILLEGAL ACTION AND THAT HE HAS LITTLE CHANCE TO
SALVAGE ANY POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. NI SECRETARY MASON
WILL CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE UAC FROM GAIN-
ING FURTHER POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL SUPPORT TO THIS
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END HE WILL MAKE A "VERY IMPORTANT" SPEECH IN NI TO-
MORROW. BUT THE SPEECH WILL NOT ROT NOT CONTAIN ANY
CHANGES IN HMG'S CURRENT POLICY TOWARD NI. HMG IS ALSO
DETERMINED TO MOVE AGAINST STRIKERS WHO ATTEMPT TO SET UP
ROAD BLOCKS OR COERCE WORKERS INTO SUPPORTING THE STRIKE
END SUMMARY

1 NIO UNDER SECRETARY JOHN BOURN REVIEWED HMG'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IN NI AND ITS GENERAL STRATEGY WITH AN EMBODIMENT APRIL 28. BASICALLY, HMG BELIEVES LAN PAISLEY AND ERNEST BAIRD ARE TRYING TO USE THE UAC AND THE THREATENED GENERAL STRIKE TO GAIN A POLITICAL ADVANTAGE IN THE MAY 18 LOCAL ELECTIONS. HMG RECOGNIZES, HOWEVER, THAT THE SITUATION ALSO REFLECTS THE DISQUIET AND CONCERN FELT BY MANY UNIONISTS OVER THE SECURITY SITUATION (WHICH CONTINUES TO IMPROVE' ACCORDING TO HMG) AND DIRECT RULE. PAISLEY, WHO IN THE PAST HAS CAREFULLY AVOIDED DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES, IS EXPECTED TO AVOID STEPPING OVER THE LINE THIS TIME. UAC LEADERS, HOWEVER, ARE WELL AWARE OF HIS PROCLIVITIES AND ARE ENDEAVORING TO ENSURE HE IS WITH THEM EVERY STEP OF THE WAY. THIS, OF COURSE, LESSENS THE UAC'S EFFECTIVENESS

2. ACCORDING TO HMG, THE UAC DOES NOT BEGIN TO ENJOY THE KIND OF POPULAR SUPPORT THE ULSTER WORKERS COUNCIL (UWC) HAD AT THE TIME OF THE 1974 STRIKE. MOREOVER, THE UAC'S ANNOUNCED OBJECTIVES -- TOUGHER SECURITY POLICY AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION REPORT -- ARE UNATTAINABLE AND FAR MORE NEBULOUS THAN THOSE OF THE 1974 STRIKE. THUS FAR HMG HAS BEEN ABLE TO PERSUADE THE MODERATE UNIONIST GROUPS TO WITHHOLD THEIR SUPPORT AND TO CRITICIZE THE STRIKE PROPOSAL NOTING THAT THE SITUATION REMAINS VERY FLUID AND UNPREDICTABLE, BOURN SAID THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE STRIKE, SHOULD IT EVENTUATE, WOULD BE VERY EFFECTIVE

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INDEED, THE NIO DOES NOT CURRENTLY SEE HOW PAISLEY CAN GAIN ANY POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM THE SITUATION. SHORT OF SEEKING MARTYRDOM BY ONLY ENGAGING IN ILLEGAL ACTION, AND HIS RECORD SUGGESTS THAT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY.

3. NI SECRETARY ROY MASON, WHO MET WITH THE CABINET THIS MORNING (APRIL 28) TO OBTAIN APPROVAL OF A "VERY IMPORTANT" SPEECH HE IS SCHEDULED TO MAKE IN BELFAST APRIL 29 AND OF THE NIO'S CONTINGENCY PLANS IN THE EVENT THE STRIKE MATERIALIZES, WILL CONTINUE EFFORTS TO LESSEN SUPPORT FOR THE UAC. MASON'S APRIL 27 ANNOUNCEMENT OF A 70-MILLION-POUND CONSTRUCTION ORDER FOR BELFAST'S HARLAND AND WOLFF SHIPYARD (OUT TOGETHER, INCIDENTALLY BY HAROLD LEVER) WAS DESIGNED TO UNDERSCORE THE POTENTIAL DAMAGE A STRIKE COULD CAUSE. THE PLANNED APRIL 29 SPEECH, ACCORDING TO BOURN, WILL NOT CONTAIN ANY CHANGES IN HMG'S NI POLICY, THOUGH HE IMPLIED THAT IT WOULD INCLUDE SOME COSMETIC PROPOSALS. BOURN STRESSED

THAT HMG WISHED TO AVOID OFFENDING THE IRISH GOVERNMENT

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AND SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE CONSULTED ABOUT THE CONTENT OF MASON'S SPEECH.

4. AMONG THE FACTORS LEADING HMG TO BELIEVE A SUCCESSFUL GENERAL STRIKE IS UNLIKELY IS INFORMATION THAT THE ESSENTIAL POWER GENERATING PLANT WORKERS OPPOSE IT (MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE COOPERATION OF THE POWER PLANT WORKERS WAS THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF THE 1974 STRIKE -- BOURN ALSO NOTED THAT AS A RESULT OF THE 1974 STRIKE ALL CRITICAL PUBLIC SERVICES SUCH AS HOSPITALS, WATER WORKS, AND THE TELEPHONE SYSTEM, AND MANY INDUSTRIAL PLANTS, HAVE INSTALLED EMERGENCY GENERATING PLANTS). ALTHOUGH MANUAL WORKERS AT THE POWER PLANTS REPORTEDLY SUPPORT THE UAC, THE KEY MIDDLE LEVEL EMPLOYEES WHO ACTUALLY OPERATE THE PLANTS DO NOT. IF NECESSARY, HMG IS PREPARED TO PROTECT THESE EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILIES FROM UAC COERCION OR REPRESSION. IT ALSO HAS CONTINGENCY PLANS TO BRING IN MILITARY TECHNICIANS TO HELP RUN THE POWER STATIONS, SHOULD THEY BE NEEDED, THOUGH BOURN STRESSED THAT THE MILITARY WOULD NOT BE

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ABLE TO RUN THESE FACILITIES WITHOUT CIVILIAN DIRECTION AND ASSISTANCE. HMG, HE SAID, ALSO HAS CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR THE SECURITY FORCES TO MOVE AGAINST STRIKERS WHO SEEK TO SET UP ROAD BLOCKS, HIJACK FUEL TRUCKS OR OTHERWISE ENGAGE IN PATENTLY ILLEGAL ACTS.

5. COMMENT: HMG IS CLEARLY RESOLVED TO AVOID A REPEAT OF THE 1974 UWC STRIKE. ITS RESOLUTION IN THIS REGARD, AT LEAST IN OUR VIEW, IS THE PRODUCT OF THE MARKEDLY DIFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH NOW PREVAIL, THE PERCEIVED ABSENCE OF BROADLY BASED SUPPORT FOR THE UAC, THE NATURE OF THE UAC'S OBJECTIVES AND THE EXPERIENCE GAINED IN 1974. WE HAVE NO SPECIAL INSIGHTS INTO HOW EVENTS WILL UNFOLD BEGINNING MAY 3, BUT NOTE THAT BELFAST'S ASSESSMENT (REFTEL) IS CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF HMG. WE ALSO SHARE HMG'S VIEW THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW PAISLEY CAN GAIN ANY POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM THIS SITUATION, AND THAT, AS THEY SAY, IS NOT NOTHING.

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